

DOSSIER

Quality, learning and systemic assessment: discourses from international organizations for Latin American countries

**REDUCA as a Seeder of Consensus in Latin America:
Evaluation, Standardization, and Subordination*****A REDUCA como semeadora de consensos na América Latina: avaliação,
padronização e subordinação***

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ABSTRACT

Latin America has a history marked by brutal processes of expropriation by European powers since the 16th century. Wars, reforms, struggles for independence, and revolutions coexist with the harassment by imperialist countries, in collusion with different bourgeois factions in the region, to maintain a condition of subordination. Based on this, the present article aims to reflect on the consensuses that business sectors, articulated around *Rede Latino-Americana de Organizações da Sociedade Civil pela Educação* (REDUCA), have formulated for education in Latin America in recent decades. REDUCA was officially launched in Brasília in 2011, sponsored by the IDB, big companies, and corporate foundations. The primary documents analyzed argue that Latin American economies suffer from low productivity, supporting the claim that increased schooling directly enhances productivity, presupposing a linear relationship between education and business competitiveness. In this context, the IDB and other supranational organizations promote the formation of social networks, such as REDUCA, which consists of various 'private apparatuses of hegemony,' in Gramscian terms, to act on the implementation of educational reforms, introducing large-scale evaluations, curriculum standardizations, and control of teaching work.

Keywords: REDUCA. Educational Reforms. Consensus. Latin America. Evaluation.

RESUMO

A América Latina tem sua história marcada por processos brutais de expropriação por parte das potências europeias desde o século XVI. Guerras, reformas, lutas pela independência e revoluções convivem com o assédio dos países imperialistas, em conluio com as diferentes frações burguesas da região, pela manutenção de uma condição de subordinação. Com base nisso, o presente artigo visa refletir sobre os consensos que as frações empresariais, articuladas em torno da Rede Latino-Americana de Organizações da Sociedade Civil pela Educação (REDUCA), formularam para a educação na América Latina nas últimas décadas. A REDUCA foi

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oficialmente lançada em Brasília no ano de 2011, com o patrocínio do BID e de grandes empresas e fundações empresariais. Os principais documentos analisados defendem que as economias latino-americanas padecem de baixa produtividade, sustentando o argumento de que o aumento na escolaridade da população amplia diretamente a produtividade, pressupondo uma relação linear entre educação e competitividade empresarial. Nesse bojo, o BID e demais organismos supranacionais impulsionam a formação de redes sociais, como a REDUCA, que se constitui de diversos ‘aparelhos privados de hegemonia’, nos termos gramscianos, para atuar na efetivação de reformas educacionais, implantando avaliações em larga escala, padronizações curriculares e controle do trabalho docente.

Palavras-chave: REDUCA. Reformas Educacionais. Consensos. América Latina. Avaliação.

Introduction

Latin America has a history marked by brutal processes of land and cultural expropriation of its indigenous peoples by European colonialism since the late 15th century, as noted by Berardo (1981) and Galeano (1981). After the processes of wars, reforms, independence, and national-democratic revolutions, the region remains, with some exceptions, predominantly capitalist societies marked by dependence on the core capitalist powers, with economies primarily focused on the export of raw materials and semi-manufactured products (commodities), resulting in an underdeveloped industrial sector. The countries that make up Latin America and the Caribbean reached 2019 with about 26 million unemployed people, or more than 8% of workers without jobs. Among the youth, this rate was close to 20%, according to data from the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2019) collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, which, in turn, caused jobs to be decimated worldwide from 2020 onwards. Among those employed, 53% were in informal employment, with these proportions worsening among women, youth, and black people.

The gap between social classes is striking in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), approximately 185 million people (30.1%) were living in poverty¹ in the region in 2018, of which 66 million were in extreme poverty, 20 million more than in 2014 (CEPAL, 2020). Estimates indicated that by the end of 2020, there would be 230 million Latin Americans and Caribbeans living in poverty (CEPAL, 2020).

In an economic system that allocates to the working masses only a fraction of the value produced and maintains a vast reserve army of unemployed workers, conflicts are endemic and must be managed by the ruling class to sustain the conditions necessary for surplus value extraction. While the subordinate class endeavors to organize its resistance—through workers’ unions, political parties, associations, social movements, and independent media—to free itself from the constraints of labor subsumed by capital, the ruling class mobilizes an arsenal of media, legal, and military mechanisms to sustain the bourgeois order. This order seeks, through the actions of its organic intellectuals in private hegemonic apparatuses and the state apparatus, to secure maximal consent from the subordinate class to the bourgeois historical project. When consent is insufficient, the state’s armed apparatus intervenes to enforce, through coercion, the perpetuation of class society.

¹ A concept used by the World Bank to distinguish a population group according to their income. Those considered to be in extreme poverty are those who live on less than US\$ 1.90 per day.

In Brazil, the primary sources of external funding for education-related projects come from the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which together accounted for over 80% of such loans obtained by the country, influencing policies across various sectors (Melgarejo, 2017). Regarding education, both institutions have specific divisions dedicated to the subject, and they have a history of significant projects funded in Brazil. However, their educational agendas are highly convergent², based on the premise of education as a means of developing human capital to meet the demands of capital reproduction.

The main documents from these supranational organizations concerning educational policies (Vegas; Gonzalez; Vera, 2013; Vegas *et al.*, 2016; Banco Mundial, 2010; 2018; 2019) argue that Latin American economies have suffered from low productivity in recent decades, which has led to a loss of international competitiveness for businesses. As a solution, they advocate the rhetoric that increasing a population's educational attainment would boost productivity, thus establishing a linear cause-and-effect relationship between education and business competitiveness. This perspective reorients the entire structure of schooling toward market principles, ultimately advocating for the privatization of public school management.

Thus, the widely publicized concerns of the business sector regarding youth school dropout rates, low student performance on large-scale assessments, inequalities in access to education, and difficulties in student retention, among others, should be understood through the lens that these issues impact productivity, thereby justifying the reductionist approach to education promoted by educational reforms at the expense of a more humanistic and holistic concept of education.

The hegemonic education project, as defined by these educational reforms, is based on the false premise that equal access to schooling would turn students from different backgrounds into competitors with equal chances and conditions to access jobs in the capitalist market. Through this narrative, the private hegemonic apparatuses (PHAs) that support the bourgeois hegemonic project, along with supranational organizations like the World Bank, UNESCO, and the IDB, produce a perverse logic that drains the content of public education in favor of curricular homogenization, admitting only what can be verified through large-scale assessments and replacing the historical context of the curriculum with the development of socio-emotional skills, arguing that these are the competencies required for the 21st-century labor market.

What is fundamentally a project of a specific class is presented as if it were of universal interest. The need to train workers who are unaware of the most basic determinants of their lives is generalized under the guise of "*education for all*," when, in practice, it is an educational project tailored for the subordinate class, while the education of the ruling class remains far removed from public schools.

Over the past decades, the formation of social networks has been actively promoted by major supranational bodies to legitimize the political agenda agreed upon by capital in global education forums, particularly through a series of meetings, including the Jomtien Conference in

² An example of this convergence is Emilianita Vegas, who worked for more than a decade at the World Bank before becoming the head of the Education Division at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 2012. Additionally, Guiomar Namó de Mello served as a Senior Education Specialist at the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

1990, the World Education Summit in Dakar in 2000, and the World Education Forum in Incheon in 2015 (Melgarejo, 2023). In this context, the IDB and other supranational organizations have been advancing the creation of social networks, such as REDUCA (Latin American Network of Civil Society Organizations for Education), as a strategy to circumvent resistance to their projects, working to coordinate and generate consensus for the implementation of educational reforms.

This article aims to reflect on the consensus that business sectors, organized around REDUCA³, have formulated regarding education in Latin America over the past decades, particularly focusing on large-scale assessments.

The Role of REDUCA in Latin America and the Necessary Consensus

REDUCA was officially launched in Brasília in 2011 during the international congress organized by the business movement *Todos Pela Educação* (TPE), titled “*Education: An Urgent Agenda.*” The event was sponsored by the IDB and major companies and corporate foundations, including DPaschoal, Faber-Castell, Bradesco Foundation, Itaú Social Foundation, Camargo Corrêa Institute, Gerdau Institute, Unibanco Institute, Itaú BBA, Santander, Suzano Papel e Celulose. It also received support from Amics, Amigos da Escola, Canal Futura, DM9DDB, Fundação Santillana, Fundação Victor Civita, GIFE, Gol Linhas Aéreas Inteligentes, Grupo ABC, Instituto Ayrton Senna, HSBC Solidarity Institute, Natura Institute, Paulo Montenegro Institute, McKinsey & Company, Microsoft, Patri Public Affairs, Rede Energia, and Rede Globo. (REDUCA, 2011).

It can be stated that REDUCA goes far beyond school education, as it is the result of the ruling class’s coordination to maintain and update bourgeois hegemony, orchestrated by groups of organic intellectuals who have achieved a high degree of homogeneity, consciousness, and organization, acting as a kind of organic elite in our society (Dreifuss, 1987)⁴. According to Melgarejo (2023), REDUCA can be considered a mobile front of transnational⁵ power, organized based on private

³ The article under consideration presents the results of a doctoral documentary research focused on Reduca. This research is part of a broader umbrella study, funded by FAPESC/UEDESC, exploring the contributions of Lenin and Gramsci to contemporary educational policies. For more details on the research, see Melgarejo (2023).

⁴ René Armand Dreifuss, a professor and researcher of Uruguayan origin, introduced important categories and concepts for analyzing the role of business in the construction of hegemony, among which are “Mobile Action Fronts” and “organic elite.” These concepts have been freely and selectively employed here to elucidate the organic nature of corporate involvement in policy formulation, considering the author’s strong connection to the analysis of Brazil’s political-economic context, a particularly original perspective he developed while serving as a professor at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF) and other institutions in the country. However, in the present article, this adoption is merely complementary to the Gramscian perspective to which this discussion is aligned. In our view, the concept of “Mobile Fronts” appears to have a more operative meaning, not dismissing Gramsci’s category of Private Hegemonic Apparatuses (PHAs). That is, the mobile fronts act as such because they are PHAs. As for the “organic elite,” it refers to an ‘elite’ of organic intellectuals. Therefore, the fundamental issue is understanding the role that these intellectuals play within their respective PHAs.

⁵ According to Dreifuss (1987, p. 26), “[...] a mobile power front [...] [functions] as an information hub, as a laboratory of ideas, and as a forum for large corporate conglomerates on matters related to ideological and political propaganda; it develops means of popular mobilization and ensures the achievement of the ideological hegemony of the capitalist power structure by legitimizing the corporate order, defining the parameters of what is permissible and what is rejectable, and setting the reference points for public debate, stamping and separating ‘realism’ from ‘utopia.’

hegemonic apparatuses (PHAs), in Gramscian terms, originating from 15 countries, as shown in the table below:

Table 1: REDUCA Member Countries and Their Respective PHAs in 2023

Country	Private Hegemonic Apparatus	Year of Establishment
El Salvador	FEPADE El Salvador	1986
Costa Rica	Fundación Omar Dengo	1987
Dominican Republic	Acción Empresarial por la Educación	1988
Honduras	Fundación para la Educación Ricardo Ernesto Maduro Andreu	1998
Nicaragua	Fundación Eduquemos	1998
Colombia	Empresarios por la Educación	2002
Guatemala	Empresarios por la Educación	2002
Ecuador	FARO	2004
Argentina	Proyecto Educar 2050	2006
Brazil	Todos Pela Educação	2006
Mexico	Mexicanos Primero	2005
Peru	Empresarios por la Educación	2007
Chile	Educación 2020	2008
Paraguay	Juntos por la Educación	2011
Panama	Unidos por la Educación	2011

Source: Melgarejo (2023, p. 28).

From a Gramscian perspective, so-called ‘civil society organizations’ are essentially Private Hegemonic Apparatuses (PHAs). Their role is to craft proposals that align with the interests of the social fractions to which they are connected. In turn, each PHA consists of intellectuals who, according to Gramsci (2010), play an organizing role in society by developing and promoting a worldview that reflects the class to which they are organically linked. In other words, they are involved in the creation of consensus.

In Gramscian theory, consensus should be understood alongside its opposite, force. Thus, “[...] while the ethical element pertains to consensus—developed and contested within civil society—politics refers to state and governmental initiatives, encompassing the institutional and coercive dimensions” (Aliaga, 2021, p. 99).

According to the Sardinian communist revolutionary, to truly understand the system of domination within the modern bourgeois state, it is essential to conceive of the State not merely as “[...] the apparatus of government, but also [as] the private apparatus of hegemony or civil society” (Gramsci, 2014, p. 258). Gramsci, therefore, introduces the concept of the integral or expanded state, which organically includes both political society, or the restricted state, and civil society, the arena where class struggle unfolds. This framework requires a decisive break from the increasingly prevalent notion that, on one side, there is a neutral state, and on the other, the so-called civil society, represented by various organizations. As Silva *et al.* (2021, p. 3) point out, within the bourgeois order, particularly in critical analyses of educational policies, “[...] there is no such thing as educational policy *per se*, nor is there a state *per se*.”

Drawing on Gramsci's concept of the integral state, the analysis of REDUCA and its expansion across Latin America reveals that its proposals should be understood as manifestations of the bourgeois order. The private apparatuses of hegemony (APHs) within REDUCA align with the directives set by the organic elites who craft the policies of the IDB and the European Commission, working in close coordination with state apparatuses. Thus, REDUCA embodies a class project, though often veiled and embellished in its publications. The network is intricately woven into the educational agenda driven by the major supranational organizations.

According to its public declarations, REDUCA's guiding international documents are those issued by supranational bodies that legitimize bourgeois ideology, as outlined below:

Education for All [UNESCO], the 2021 Goals [OEI, in partnership with CEPAL], and the process for the right to education that develops around the post-2015 Goals [...], the concept of education as a fundamental right in accordance with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1959 (REDUCA, 2016, p. 5).

Members of REDUCA have established projects, financial assistance, partnerships, or direct alliances with the U.S.A state apparatus, primarily through USAID and U.S. embassies in their respective countries. Notably, the Omar Dengo Foundation, Educación 2020, and the Faro Group maintain direct alliances with the U.S. Embassy. Unidos por la Educación in Paraguay, for instance, has a partnership with the Peace Corps⁶. The oldest APHs, such as Fepade, Omar Dengo Foundation, *Eduquemos*, *Educa*, and *Ferema*—established in the 1980s and 1990s—have received USAID funding either since their inception or in their early years (Melgarejo, 2023). Newer APHs, like the Faro Group (Ecuador) (Faro, [2023]), *Empresarios por la Educación* (Colombia) (Empresarios por la Educación, 2022), and *Empresarios por la Educación* (Guatemala) (Empresarios por la Educación, 2023), also enjoy sponsorships or partnerships with USAID.

The principles espoused by REDUCA are outlined in its foundational document, the Brasília Charter, which defines it as:

[...] an assembly of organizations from various Latin American countries, united by a public and common commitment to actively participate in ensuring that children and young people fully exercise their right to inclusive and quality education in each of our countries and throughout the region (REDUCA, 2011, p. 1).

Regarding its internal organization, REDUCA operates through two bodies: the Assembly of Members and the Governance Council, as explained by Martins (2019):

The Assemblies function as the operational network space of REDUCA, with all its members participating. The Governance Council, on the other hand, leads REDUCA's strategic efforts. This Council is considered a technical body whose function is to set strategic directives and manage key issues necessary for the network's operations, such as securing funding from international organizations. The Council is composed of representatives from six REDUCA

⁶ On its official website, the Peace Corps, a U.S. government agency, states that its mission is to: "1) Assist interested countries in meeting their needs for trained personnel. 2) Help promote a better understanding of Americans among the nations served. 3) Help promote a better understanding of other peoples among Americans" (Peace Corps, 2023).

members, who are elected during the Assembly. It is chaired by a Secretary-General, who serves a one-year term, also elected from among the members (Martins, 2019, p. 114).

Other principles announced at the time of its launch included: a willingness to learn through the exchange of experiences; collaborative work in pursuit of so-called “best practices”; the concept of “State and education,” emphasizing *accountability*; co-responsibility, advocating for active citizen participation in the formulation, monitoring, and evaluation of educational policies; and participation, which aims to foster a “constructive” relationship between the public and private sectors (REDUCA, 2011).

In the document titled, *Posicionamento: REDUCA*, the following principles of the network are outlined:

The understanding that Education is a fundamental human right, as it is a prerequisite for the exercise of other rights. The comprehension that the right to education is exercised when learning conditions are guaranteed for all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances.

The responsibility of the state is to ensure that this right is realized through the provision of quality public education and by promoting the involvement of all sectors and stakeholders.

The recognition that the quality of education is an essential component for the fulfillment of the right to education, whether in its provision or its outcomes, with a holistic understanding of quality.

The focus of education on its role in reducing inequality and poverty and in promoting equity and inclusion, as these factors represent the greatest challenge to social progress in the region (REDUCA, 2016, p. 4).

In other words, REDUCA positions itself and has been actively advocating for the involvement of the so-called private sector in the public education system—a trend that has been expanding across Latin America in various forms. REDUCA elevates education to a near-miraculous status as a solution to all economic problems, arguing that “[...] psychosocial issues, risk behaviors, and levels of employment and income are linked to educational quality” (REDUCA, 2016, p. 3). This represents another insidious attempt to shift the responsibility for chronic problems, which stem from exploiting subordinate classes within the overarching logic of capital accumulation, onto public education.

Lamosa (2017, p. 8), in her analysis of REDUCA’s composition, identifies seven points of similarity among the Private Hegemony Apparatuses that are involved:

- 1) A similar administrative structure: This includes a general assembly of members, a board of directors, a supervisory council, an advisory board, and various committees for specialized issues;
- 2) Development of long-term agendas: For example, Brazil set 2022 as a historical benchmark, Chile targeted 2020, and Argentina set its milestone for 2050;
- 3) Support for Public-Private Partnerships: Endorsement and facilitation of collaborations between public institutions and private entities.
- 4) Emphasis on integrating volunteer work into policies aimed at guaranteeing the right to education.
- 5) Clear separation from government and market influences: These organizations define themselves as part of a “Third Sector” or “Civil Society,” representing citizenship and claiming a “nonpartisan” stance.
- 6) Close collaboration with the media: This includes affiliations with major media corporations, such as the Roberto Marinho group in Brazil and Televisa in Mexico, which is associated with the “Mexicanos

Primer” movement. 7) Designation as “Think Tanks”: They adopt the status of specialists, positioning themselves as experts on educational reforms within their countries.

The analysis of these points reveals a clearly defined standard procedure, indicating a systematic approach designed to implement a specific strategy for the Latin American region. The networked nature of REDUCA thus provides significant insight into its objectives.

Although a detailed exploration is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that the strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean reflects an overarching international agenda. The alignment of this agenda with the unique conditions of each country in the region aims to perpetuate the international division of labor, thereby reinforcing the subordination of these peripheral countries to the central capitalist economies (Marini, 2005). This approach seeks to maintain the dependency of these nations, utilizing the most contemporary historical forms that align with the evolution of productive forces within the capital’s dynamics. As Silva *et al.* (2021, p. 10) observe:

The issue at hand is to examine the arguments consistently presented by business entities, which reduce the problem to a mere issue of income distribution. They propose that a ‘fair’ tax reform, combined with education aligned with technological advancements and attentive to socio-emotional skills, would resolve the problem. Uncovering this trap requires an analytical method capable of reaching the root of apparent phenomena, and it is in Marx’s legacy that these foundational principles are found.

Thus, designing a reform agenda for public education in these countries from the perspective of capital interests involves updating the forms of subordination. Undoubtedly, REDUCA plays this role, notably with representatives from nearly all Spanish-speaking Latin American and Caribbean countries, conspicuously excluding those nations that have distanced themselves from imperialist influence: Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia. According to Bittencourt (2021), Bolivia is the only country in the region to have reduced the presence of private education in basic schooling in recent years.

Attention is drawn to the international coordination facilitated by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to finance REDUCA. In October 2012, utilizing the available loan quota for Brazil, the bank entered into two technical cooperation agreements with *Todos Pela Educação* (TPE) using non-reimbursable funds. The contract *BR-T1246: All for Education Movement: New Educational Practices and Policy Agenda* had a total cost of \$639,000, while the *BR-X1027: All for Education Movement: New Educational Practices and Policy Agenda* amounted to \$1.7 million (Alfaro *et al.*, 2012). Both contracts involved the participation of Banco Itaú BBA, Instituto Natura, Fundação Telefônica—institutions affiliated with TPE—and Samsung, a global leader in *smartphone* sales. For its part, the IDB utilized the Specific Donations Fund for Projects and the *Korean Poverty Reduction Fund*. Banco Itaú entered into the agreement through its Nassau branch in the Bahamas, a jurisdiction renowned for its tax advantages. As for REDUCA, the cooperation agreement between the IDB and TPE proposes as follows:

This component will support TPE’s efforts to facilitate the exchange of successful experiences among REDUCA organizations, aiming to enhance their influence on public policy. The resources allocated from the Korean Poverty Reduction Fund (KPR) will finance the following activities to strengthen the network: i) establishing a network for the exchange of best practices in the creation and management of social movements for education in Latin America, focusing

on their objectives, programs, funding, communication strategies, social mobilization, public policy advocacy strategies, and promoting civil society participation in dialogue and oversight of educational policies; ii) supporting the implementation of monitoring processes for educational policies and targets at the regional level or in other countries; and iii) organizing regional or national meetings with key public policy actors, civil society representatives, and stakeholders from both the public and private sectors (Alfaro *et al.*, 2012, p. 6).

From this perspective, it's evident that TPE holds a prominent position within REDUCA because it has been chosen to receive over 2 million dollars in non-reimbursable funds to coordinate and implement the IDB's educational project interests. This connection extends to national governments, linking the educational project to what are termed "public policy actors," who are essentially the organic elites operating in each country where REDUCA establishes and expands its influence. The IDB's support for REDUCA "[...] extends beyond merely selecting network members or providing subsidies; in this case, the funding also directs the actions and the 'accountability'" (Martins, 2019, p.122)

Hence, REDUCA has also outlined its objectives and presented the results of its projects at the IDB headquarters in Washington. For instance, in 2016, the network's Governance Council convened for three days with the IDB's Vice President and representatives from the Social Sector Management (including the Education Division and the Strategic Alliances Unit). The purpose of this meeting was to establish REDUCA's future strategic directions and to strengthen the alliance between the network and the IDB (Martins, 2019, p. 122).

It is important to note that the use of the South Korean fund and the involvement of Samsung can be explained by the interest in expanding the consumer market for new technologies. The cooperation agreement highlights the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the classroom. The technical cooperation document between TPE and the IDB outlines what constitutes education through electronic means:

E-learning (education through electronic means) and personalized learning environments have emerged in response to the 21st century's demands for lifelong learning and the challenge of preventing students from prematurely exiting the educational system due to significant difficulties in their schooling. These approaches aim to provide opportunities for students to re-engage with the education system and achieve the expected learning outcomes. In personalized learning environments, students can explore and create based on their own interests and goals, interacting with the community and their peers. This methodology allows for the recognition and addressing of individual performance differences, empowering students as protagonists of their own learning (Alfaro *et al.*, 2012, p. 21).

In doing so, they aim to diminish the role of the teacher as the one responsible for the teaching-learning process, while simultaneously preparing new generations for the consumption of electronic devices and equipping them for work that is mediated and controlled by these technologies. Américo Teixeira Mattar Junior, president of the Telefônica Foundation, states in the 20-year social report:

Thus, we develop projects that are grounded in human potential and leverage technology to create new teaching-learning methodologies, stimulate social development, and promote active citizenship. In this way, we have established our pillars of action: Education, Entrepreneurship, and Volunteering (Fundação Telefônica Vivo, 2019, p. 3).

These elements are encapsulated in the propositions of REDUCA and resonate with the interests of bourgeois factions operating within the educational sector, whether to promote the consumption of their products or to transform educational spaces into venues for the circulation of their goods.

There is a notable convergence among the APHs studied in the way they construct their intellectual cadres: they invite influential political figures, such as former presidents and former ministers of education; they seek popular figures in society, whether in sports or the media; and they establish a network of entrepreneurs willing to fund the organization of a common, consensus-driven agenda within the network for political action in their respective countries.

Among the hundreds of intellectuals who make up the organic elites within the APHs participating in REDUCA, those directly connected to the financial sector of the bourgeois class are particularly prominent. Examples include Citibank as a founding member of Fepade (El Salvador), Itaú and Bradesco in *Todos Pela Educação* (Brazil), Banco Proamerica in *Eduquemos* (Nicaragua), Bancolombia in *Empresarios por la Educación* (Colombia), Santander and Citi in *Proyecto Educar 2050* (Argentina), as well as intellectuals linked to Banamex and Bancomer in *Mexicanos Primero* (Mexico) and Banco de Credito del Peru in *Empresarios por la Educación* (Peru) (Melgarejo, 2023).

A striking characteristic shared by the APHs involved in REDUCA is that all include representatives from a wide range of companies across various sectors (with a significant presence of intellectuals tied to financial capital and major media outlets), in addition to politicians and other scholars with extensive media exposure and diverse connections to the state apparatus, all working in coordination on a long-term process of educational reform throughout Latin America.

There is also a common action model: advertising campaigns in collaboration with local media corporations, competitions, awards, and recognitions for “best practices,” parliamentary *lobbying* to directly influence the drafting, proposal, and approval of educational laws and regulations, as well as a myriad of projects with companies and allies that ensure the financing of their structures. The mainstream media is an indispensable ally for the members of REDUCA, who maintain close relationships with the largest media conglomerates in their respective countries.

At its core, the policies advocated by REDUCA do not differ from the recommendations of the IDB and the World Bank for education over the past decades. The discourse present in the documents published by the APHs under study eloquently highlights each country’s results in the Pisa exam, organized by the OECD, which consistently fall short of expectations and calls for urgent action. These documents emphasize the need for greater attention to early childhood, promote the idea of complete learning pathways, call for more effective managers, advocate for the valorization of teachers through meritocratic policies, and highlight the development of 21st-century skills and socio-emotional competencies as solutions for curriculum reform.

Martins (2019, p.118) argues that:

[...] By joining forces within a network, members of REDUCA seek to leverage the ‘utility of network connections’ by strengthening their capacity to influence public policies. This has been the primary strategy since the inception of REDUCA, when the IDB coordinated a working session titled “The Network in Action” to define the guidelines and outline the “Action Plan” for the newly established network. During this session, the network’s political

influence strategy, public-private partnerships, communication, and mobilization methods, among other topics, were discussed. The planning for actions over the next 12 months was also outlined, based on the projects already developed by the members (PAVISICH, 2011). For 2024, common goals were set, including the implementation of 12-year comprehensive educational pathways for students and achieving the OECD average on the standardized PISA test in Latin American countries.

By analyzing REDUCA's document (2011), it is evident that the blame for poor results in large-scale assessments is placed on teachers. Additionally, the document uses the endorsement of a prominent contemporary organic intellectual, Eric Hanushek⁷, who has had associations with the World Bank, as a persuasive tool, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

There is evidence that a better teacher improves student performance, so investments in better training and conditions for teachers and school leaders will have a direct impact on student learning outcomes: "Having a good teacher translates to more than a year's worth of learning gains for a student, whereas having a low-performing teacher means mastering, on average, 50% or less of the curriculum" (Hanushek *et al.*, 2010) (REDUCA, 2011, p. 39).

There is a consensus within the network regarding the general principles that underpin the educational framework advocated by REDUCA. All the APHs involved employ a similar approach, though with different nuances: a) a catastrophic diagnosis based on results from large-scale assessments organized by UNESCO and the OECD; b) the blaming of teachers, who are held responsible for the lag in education; c) the advocacy for teacher professionalization, manifested through various meritocratic policies for entry, retention, control, and advancement in the profession; d) the endorsement of curriculum reforms at all levels to align with "21st-century skills," emphasizing the use of technology and socio-emotional skills; and e) support for various forms of education privatization.

In 2014, REDUCA prioritized the following areas: a) early childhood development; b) teacher training and career development; c) policies for school principals; and d) school dropout and retention (REDUCA, 2013). Based on these focus areas, REDUCA entered into a *Regional Cooperation Project* with the European Union, which also included the establishment of an educational observatory. This partnership secured funding for the network during its initial years, and the observatory was launched in 2015 (EBC, 2015).

Nonetheless, in its 2019 manifesto, REDUCA identified five core priorities: ensuring comprehensive educational trajectories; providing meaningful learning experiences; enhancing the roles of teachers and principals; strengthening efforts through alliances; and going beyond standardized testing (REDUCA, 2019).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which claimed over 1.7 million lives in Latin America and the Caribbean, REDUCA identified significant opportunities for the future:

⁷ Hanushek is a professor at Stanford University and, since 1973, has served in various capacities across different branches of the U.S. government, ranging from the Air Force to the Department of Education. He currently serves on the National Assessment Governing Board, which is responsible for large-scale assessments of the U.S. educational system. He was a consultant for the World Bank from 1984 to 1995 and now works in the private sector as a global economic consultant for Learn Capital (Hanushek, 2023).

leveraging online tools and efforts, alongside effective pedagogical support and crisis management, will be crucial for making a difference in each school. This moment presents a chance to rethink learning processes and innovation, strengthen community relations within schools, and introduce multiple platforms and digital resources to support continued learning during confinement. Additionally, there is a pressing need to accelerate investments in infrastructure to improve connectivity for the most vulnerable and marginalized families. It is a time to unite and enhance multisectoral alliances, of which REDUCA has substantial evidence of their great potential (REDUCA, 2021, p. 3).

In its most recent position, REDUCA highlighted three urgent focuses due to the pandemic: firstly, the need to seek out and re-engage students who are out of school or have not returned; secondly, addressing socio-emotional learning “[...] as a fundamental element of the educational experience” (REDUCA, 2021, p. 1), a focus that has gained significant momentum due to the pandemic’s devastating impact on students’s mental health; and thirdly, reactivating and reinforcing learning, “[...] not merely aiming to complete each activity and content of the subject programs and curriculum nominally, but generating innovative learning opportunities for all” (REDUCA, 2021, p. 2, our translation).

It is important to note that large-scale assessments have consolidated as one of the main strategies for regulating the work of teachers. This centrality can be observed in documents stemming from the World Conference on Education for All, held in 1990 in Jomtien under the coordination of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as the World Bank (WB), and in the document *Education for All*, organized in 2000 by UNESCO on the occasion of the Education for All Meeting (Anjos, 2013). Therefore, it can be stated that large-scale assessments in Latin America have become an important control mechanism, aiming to align public education with the new imperatives of capital. In Brazil, particularly, it is evident that since the (counter)reform of the State initiated in the 1990s, large-scale assessments have gained greater prominence with the establishment of the National System for the Evaluation of Basic Education (SAEB)⁸; the “*Provaão*,” aimed at higher education; the National High School Exam (ENEM)⁹; and the National Exam for Certification of Competences for Youth and Adults (ENCCEJA).

In the subsequent decades, despite 14 years of Workers Party (PT) governance at the federal level, the policies of large-scale assessments and management by results remained unaffected, continuing even with the improvement of policies and expansion of their scope, as evidenced by recent research by Lima (2023), which identifies the existence of a true network of Large-Scale Evaluation (ALE) through a case study of the CAEd Complex¹⁰. According to the author, CAEd, as

⁸ Currently defined by Ordinance no. 366, dated April 29, 2019.

⁹ National Course Examination (ENC), defined by Ordinance No. 249, March 1996. Currently, the National Student Performance Examination (ENADE), defined by Ordinance No. 611, June 2024.

¹⁰ According to information on its own *website*, the “Center for Public Policies and Educational Evaluation at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (CAEd/UJFJ) is a reference in large-scale educational assessment, training of public education managers, and the development of school management technologies. With a focus on research and the production of performance measures and factors related to student learning, CAEd has been working for over twenty years in partnerships with the federal government, municipal and state education networks, and educational institutions and foundations. These various actions and projects, embedded in different contexts, all share the same goal: to ensure that all children and young people have the right to learn” (<https://caeddigital.net/index.html>).

a significant HPA (High-Performing Academy) of the bourgeoisie, operates a scalable large-scale assessment system, in conjunction with other HPAs, whose implications are summarized in three aspects:

- i) the commodification of education, through the expansion of market niches, whether through partnerships or technologies such as the Learning Support Platform developed by CAEd;
- ii) the commercialization of education, through the shaping of the workforce in its close alignment with the BNCC, training programs like the Graduate Program in Public Management (PPGP), and the promotion of Financial Education and economic-liberal consciousness;
- iii) the financialization of education, with the application of surplus resources in financial operations and the relationships established with financial institutions and NGOs (Lima, 2023, p. 264).

In conclusion, it is important to underscore that large-scale assessments seem to function as a pivotal foundation for preparing and sustaining a fertile environment in which the seeds of consensus — seeds that must be elevated to the status of “truths” — can take root. Without these, educational reforms, from the perspective of capital, would struggle to succeed. Thus, these consensuses must appear to arise organically, growing from within rather than being imposed externally.

Closing remarks

REDUCA plays the role of a consensus-builder in Latin America. Its networked approach, or as Martins (2019, p. 105), describes it, “network of networks,” affords it a privileged position in shaping consensuses aligned with capital’s global dynamics, taking into account the particularities of Latin America and the different *modus operandi* of each country in the region. This alignment always aims to safeguard the process of capital accumulation. In other words, it can be stated that intra-bourgeois disputes within the dominant class fractions must continually be accommodated and readjusted according to the movement of capital in its futile attempt to overcome inherent contradictions, as demonstrated by Marx (2008, 2011).

REDUCA, largely funded and controlled by the IDB, its primary international interlocutor (Martins, 2019), can be seen as a vantage point from which different bourgeois factions, represented by their hegemonic apparatuses, according to Gramsci, organize themselves to direct and influence public education policies in Latin America. Thus, REDUCA is strategically positioned to disseminate formulations that ensure the best possible positioning in bourgeois disputes, while simultaneously addressing and reacting to the implications of intensified social contradictions in the class struggle, always establishing the necessary consensuses.

Educational reforms, understood here as an expression of the movement of capital’s contradictions, are focused on the intensification of labor through the extension of working hours, the reduction of wages and labor costs through the withdrawal of rights, the use of public funds by the private sector, the expansion and deepening of the commodification of education, and the shaping of human development exclusively towards the needs of the labor market—translated by the network as 21st-century skills.

For education professionals, these reforms signify the loss of entire public service sectors to labor outsourcing policies; the degradation of teaching conditions; the abolition of dedicated planning time due to the rise of hourly contracts; the ongoing fragmentation of the teaching profession; and the intellectual erosion of educators through a process of professional deskilling. Masquerading as the flexibilization and modernization of labor relations and public resource management, and promoted under the *guise* of improving educational quality, these reforms necessitate a robust and organized response from the working class, including political parties, unions, collectives, and social movements.

As we have seen, educational policies are intrinsically linked to the movements of capital along two complementary axes: on one side, there is the bourgeoisie's need to ensure, from an early age, the highest degree of active consent from the working class—meaning that individuals accept their social status and assume personal responsibility for their successes or failures; on the other side, there is the necessity of value valorization, which compels capitalists to expand their markets, targeting public education as a lucrative opportunity for the growth of big business.

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Author 1 – Conception and design of the research; construction and processing of data; analysis and interpretation of data; details of their collaboration in preparing the final text.

Author 2 – Conception and design of the research; construction and processing of data; analysis and interpretation of data; details of their collaboration in preparing the final text.

SUPPORT/FINANCING

Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa e Inovação em Santa Catarina (FAPESC). 2023/TR 265.

RESEARCH DATA AVAILABILITY

Does not apply.

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

MELGAREJO, Mariano Moura; SILVA, Mariléia Maria da. REDUCA as a Seeder of Consensus in Latin America: Evaluation, Standardization, and Subordination.. *Educar em Revista*, Curitiba, v. 40, e94040, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-0411.94040>

This article was translated by Vanilson da Rosa Nunes – E-mail: vannieteacher@gmail.com. After being designed, it was submitted for validation by the author(s) before publication.

Received: 05/10/24

Approved: 07/25//24

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